DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 237 827 CG 017 081

AUTHOR Watson, Bryna A.; Ault, Ruth L.
TITLE So You Think You've Got Troubles? College Students' Referrals for Friends with Various Personal Problems.
PUB DATE Mar 83
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association (29th, Atlanta, GA, March 23-26, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Students; *Counseling Services; Friendship; *Helping Relationship; Higher Education; Peer Influence; Peer Relationship; Problem Solving; Psychological Services; *Referral; Social Attitudes; *Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Students with personal-social problems report seeking help from friends and relatives first, as compared to faculty, clergy, and counseling centers. To investigate the subsequent referrals friends might provide, 28 college freshmen, 14 male and 14 female, rated 16 problem descriptions on a 0-9 point scale according to the likelihood that they would send their friend to each of seven potential help-giving sources, i.e., dean, counseling center, chaplain, friend, parent, faculty member, or themselves. The problems were varied according to severity, history, and immediacy. An analysis of the results showed that students could distinguish among problems, although no one characteristic was of singular importance. More serious problems did lead to a greater likelihood of recommending the college counseling center and the chaplain. Subjects rated themselves and other friends consistently high across problem types, except for the most severe problems. The dean and faculty were rated consistently low except for less severe, recent past, or recurrent problems. Parents and the chaplain received their highest ratings for ongoing problems. Providers of counseling services may need to educate students about the seriousness of certain problems in order to counteract students' tendencies to see themselves as appropriate sources of help. (Author/BL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED237827

SO YOU THINK YOU'VE GOT TROUBLES? COLLEGE STUDENTS' REFERRALS FOR FRIENDS WITH VARIOUS PERSONAL PROBLEMS

BRYNA A. WATSON & RUTH L. AULT*

*DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
DAVIDSON COLLEGE
DAVIDSON, NORTH CAROLINA 28036

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Ruth L. Ault

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CG 017081

Paper presented at the Southeastern Psychological Assocation, Atlanta, GA March 24-26, 1983.

Abstract

College students with personal-social problems report seeking help from friends and relatives first, compared to faculty, deans, clergy, and counseling centers. Given this pattern, this study explored the subsequent referrals that those friends might provide. Three characteristics of the problems were systematically varied: severity (more or less), history (initial episode or recurrent), and immediacy (episode resolved or on-going). 14 male and 14 female freshmen read 16 problem descriptions and rated the stories from 0 to 9 on the likelihood that they would send their friend to each of seven potential help-giving sources. The results indicated that students can distinguish among problems, although no one characteristic was of singular importance. More serious problems did lead to a greater likelihood of recommending the college counseling center and the chaplain compared to less serious problems. Subjects rated themselves and other friends consistently high across problem types, except for the most severe problems. The dean and faculty were rated consistently low except for less severe, recent past, recurrent problems. Parents and the chaplain received their highest ratings for on-going problems. Providers of psychological services may need to educate students as to the seriousness of certain problems in order to counteract the students' tendencies to see themselves as appropriate sources of help.

So You Think You've Got Troubles?
College Students' Referrals for Friends With Various Personal Problems

When college students need help, they differentiate between educational-vocational and personal problems when choosing a help-giving source. For educational-vocational problems, students report that they would go first to college-provided services such as faculty members or counseling centers (Christensen & Magoon, 1974; Snyder, Hill, & Derksen, 1974; Webster & Fretz, 1978). On the other hand, for personal-social problems, college students overwhelmingly report that friends and relatives are their first choices with faculty and clergy as last choices (Christensen & Magoon, 1974; Snyder, Hill, & Derksen, 1974; Webster & Fretz, 1978). College counseling centers typically fall in the middle of the rankings. Students who visit counseling centers report contacting up to 6 or 7 other sources of help first (Christensen, Birk, Brooks, & Sedlacek, 1976). A similar pattern of results appears when students indicate the appropriateness of various sources of help for specific problems. Academic routine and vocational problems are ranked as most appropriate for a counseling center, whereas personal problems are ranked third or least appropriate (Resnick & Gelso, 1971; Strong, Hendel, & Bratton, 1971; Wilcove & Sharp, 1971).

Given that students referring themselves for help with personal problems will likely turn to friends first, it is important to explore the subsequent referrals that those friends will provide. Only one study has asked students to rate the appropriateness of various helpers for hypothetical problems of their friends or fellow students (Utz & Bergman, 1978). In contrast to the self-referral pattern where family and friends were rated as more appropriate than college services for personal problems, students in the Utz and Bergman study ranked psychological services as more appropriate than friends for two personal problems (mood swings and apathy-suicide) and as equally appropriate as friends for alcoholism and discomfort with the opposite sex.

Because the four problems posed by Utz and Bergman did not systematically vary the characteristics of the problems, it is not clear what accounted for the differential rankings of the help-giving sources. The major purpose of the present study, therefore, was to isolate factors which might predict referral suggestions. Based on interviews with two counseling center psychologists, a dean of students, and a chaplain, three problem factors were identified: history of the problem (whether this is the initial occurrence or it is recurrent), severity of the problem (less or more severe), and immediacy (whether the problem appears resolved for the time being or is currently happening).

Method

Freshmen (14 male, 14 female) at a small liberal-arts college read 16 problem descriptions. Freshmen were selected because previous research indicated they were more likely to choose parents over friends for unspecified personal problems (Christensen & Magoon, 1974; Webster & Fretz, 1978). Seven potential help-giving sources were listed under each problem. Subjects rated the likelihood, on a scale from 0 to 9, that they would send their friend to this source for the particular problem. Problems varied on three dimensions with two levels of each. Severity of the problem was defined according to the content of the story. Less severe problems included feeling blue, having religious doubts, arguing with parents, arguing with roommates, being pressured by friends to spend more time involved in organizational activities, being left out of an activity by friends, having an identity crisis, and facing the imminent death of a grandparent. More severe problems included parents divorcing, being addicted to drugs, drinking too heavily, uncontrollable crying, anxiety about homosexual feelings, feeling suicidal, having mood swings, and arguing with a fiance. History of the problem was operationally defined as "initial" if this was the first episode or as "recurrent" if it had happened before. Immediacy of the problem was defined as "recent past" if the problem was apparently resolved but the person was worrying about it recurring in the future. It was defined as "on-going" if it had not yet been resolved. Two stories were constructed for each level of the 3 problem dimensions. Table 1 illustrates the specific stories associated with each problem type.

The seven potential help-giving sources were a dean of students, a counseling center, a chaplain, a friend, a parent, a faculty member, or the subjects themselves. Subjects were instructed to rate the general source and not to think of a particular person who may or may not be seen as competent. Stories were identical for male and female subjects except that the pronouns referring to the friend were matched to the sex of the subject.

Results

The ratings indicating the likelihood that the subject would send their friend to a particular source were analyzed in a 2 (sex of subject) X 2 (History) X 2 (Severity) X 2 (Immediacy) X 7 (Source of help) ANOVA. Sex was the only between subject factor, and it was the only factor which was not significant in effect. Consequently, it will not be considered further.

All possible 2-, 3-, and 4-way interactions were significant. The main effects of immediacy and source were also significant. Table 1 below indicates the means associated with the 4-way interaction. Also indicated in Table 1 are the significantly different means associated with the sources of help at each of the 8 problem combinations. For these comparisons, a mean difference of at least 2.5 was needed. As has been found in previous studies, faculty members and the dean of students are the least favored sources of help for personal problems. Where a score of 0 represents "Wouldn't recommend this source at all" and a score of 9 represents "Definitely would recommend this source," the faculty and dean averaged 3.4 and 2.8 respectively. All other sources ranged from 5.9 to 6.8. The general trend is for the dean and faculty to be significantly lower than parent, self, and friend across most problem types and to be significantly lower than the chaplain and counseling center

for the more severe problems. Ratings for parent, self, and friend were never significantly different, and the chaplain did not differ from these three sources except for one problem type. The counseling center, by being assigned intermediate ratings, generally did not differ from other sources except at the more severe problems, where it was significantly higher than the dean and faculty.

Table 2 contains the same mean values as Table 1, but it indicates significant differences associated with the problem types for each of the seven sources of help. For these comparisons, a mean difference had to be at least 1.1 to be significant. Across problem types, the faculty and dean received a similar rating pattern. Students report they are more likely to recommend these two sources when the problem is less severe, recent past, but recurrent. They are less likely to recommend these two sources when the problem is either of minimal importance (less severe, recent past, initial episode) or of maximal importance (more severe, on-going, recurrent).

The lowest rating for the counseling center occurred for the problems of least importance. However, subjects appeared to recognize when problems were serious by increasing the center's rating when at least two out of the three factors were serious. This suggests that subjects recognized psychological services were appropriate for more severe, recurrent, on-going problems.

The chaplain and parents received their highest ratings when the problem was on-going (at both severity levels if initial, and at less severe if recurrent).

Finally, ratings for other friends (i.e., referring the friend with a problem to yet another friend) and for self (i.e., handling the friend's problem oneself) were similar. All problems were seen as appropriate for friends and self except at the most important level. Ratings ranged from 6.4 to 7.2 for all problems except the most serious, recurrent, on-going ones, when the ratings drop to 5.4 (friend) and 5.7 (self).

Discussion

From the differential rating patterns, it is apparent that students can distinguish among problem types, although no one factor (severity, immediacy, or history) is of overriding importance. From the practical standpoint of getting students to refer their friends to college-provided resources such as a chaplain or a counseling center, it is encouraging to note that the more serious problems led to a greater likelihood of recommending those sources. On the other hand, subjects apparently believe themselves and their friends equally capable of handling most problems. Subjects rated themselves and other friends consistently high across problem types. For the five most serious problem combinations, ratings for self were not significantly lower than ratings for the counseling center or chaplain. The stories corresponding to these problems included heavy drinking, drug usage, mood swings, suicide feelings, uncontrollable crying, and homosexual feelings. It is suggested that providers of psychological services may need to educate students as to the seriousness of certain problems in order to counteract students' tendencies to see themselves as appropriate sources of help.

References

Christensen, K. C., Birk, J. M., Brooks, L., & Sedlacek, W. E. Where clients go before contacting the university counseling center. Journal of College Student Personnel, 1976, 17, 396-399.

Christensen, K. C., & Magoon, T. M. Perceived hierarchy of help-giving sources for two categories of student problems. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1974, 21, 311-314.

Resnick, H., & Gelso, C. J. Differential perceptions of counseling role: a reexamination. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1971, 18, 549-553.

Snyder, J. F., Hill, C. E., & Derksen, T. P. Why some students do not use university counseling facilities. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1972, 19, 263-268.

Strong, S. R., Hendel, D. D., & Bratten, J. C. College students' views of campus help-givers: counselors, advisers, and psychiatrists. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1971, 18, 234-238.

Utz, P., & Bergman, S. Comparison of three counseling center referral sources in terms of their rating of the appropriateness of potential helpers. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1978, 25, 144-149.

Webster, D. W., & Fretz, B. R. Asian American, black, and white college students' preferences for help-giving sources. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1978, 25, 124-130.

Wilcove, G., & Sharp, H. Differential perceptions of a college counseling center. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1971, 18, 60-63,

Table 1. Average rating of the likelihood a source would be recommended to a friend with a particular problem. Ratings ranged from 0 = Not recommend at all to 9 = Definitely recommend.

	PROBLEM TYPES							
Severity:	Less severe				More severe			
Immediacy:	Recent past		On-going		Recent past		On-going	
Source of help / History:	Initial	Recurrent	Initial	Recurrent	Initial	Recurrent	Initial	Recurrent
Dean of Students	1.6 A	5.2 AB	3.0 A	3.6 A	1.8 A	2.7 A	3.0 A	1.8 A
Faculty Member	2.6 AB	4.6 AB	3.9 A	3.8 A	2.6 AB	3.2 AB	3.8 A	2.3 A
Counseling Center	4.3 BC	4.2 A	4.8 AB	6.0 AB	5.4 C	7.5 C	7.3 B	7.6 B
Chaplain	4.6 BCD	4.2 A	7.4 C	7.2 B	5.1 BC	6.1 C	7.8 B	6.2 B
Parent	6.2 CD	5.2 AB	7.0 BC	7.1 B	5.4 C	5.4 BC	7.6 B	5.5 B
Self	7.0 D	6.4 AB	7.2 BC	6.7 B	6.6 C	6.6 C	6.8 B	5.7 B
Friend	7.0 D	7.1 B	7.2 BC	6.9 B	7.0 C	6.5 C	7.2 B	5.4 B

Column means which share a letter are NOT significantly different.

Particular story contents for each problem type
Rejected by friends & parent arguments
Pressure to join club & roommate arguments
Religious doubts & feeling blue
Grandparent dying & identity crisis
Drinking & fiance arguments
Drugs & mood swings
Suicide & parents divorcing
Uncontrollable crying & homosexuality

Table 2. Average rating of the likelihood a source would be recommended to a friend with a particular problem. Ratings ranged from 0 = Not recommend at all to 9 = Definitely recommend.

	PROBLEM TYPES							
Severity:	Less severe				More severe			
Immediacy:	Recent past		On-going		Recent past		On-going	
Source of help / History:	Initial	Recurrent	Initial	Recurrent	Initial	Recurrent	Initial	Recurrent
Dean of Students	1.6 X	5.2 Z	3.0 Y	3.6 Y	1.8 X	2.7 XY	3.0 Y	1.8 X
Faculty Member	2.6 X	4.6 Z	3.9 YZ	3.8 YZ	2.6 X	3.2 XY	3.8 YZ	2.3 X
Counseling Center	4.3 XY	4.2 X	4.8 XY	6.0 Z	5.4 YZ	7.5 W	7.3 W	7.6 W
Chaplain	4.6 X	4.2 X	7.4 W	7.2 ZW	5.1 XY	6.1 YZ	7.8 W	6.2 YZ
Parent	6.2 XY	5.2 X	7.0 YZ	7.1 YZ	5.4 X	5.4 X	7.6 Z	5.5 X
Self	7.0 Y	6.4 XY	7.2 Y	6.7 XY	6.6 XY	6.6 XY	6.8 XY	5.7 X
Friend	7.0 Y	7.1 Y	7.2 Y	6.9 Y	7.0 Y	6.5 XY	7.2 Y	5.4 X

Row means which share a letter are NOT significantly different.

Particular story contents for each problem type
Rejected by friends & parent arguments
Pressure to join club & roommate arguments
Religious doubts & feeling blue
Grandparent dying & identity crisis
Drinking & fiance arguments
Drugs & mood swings
Suicide & parents divorcing
Uncontrollable crying & homosexuality